The pope, the CIA and the KGB

A s Alice might have said, the so-called Bulgarian Connection in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II gets "curiousier and curiousier."

The curiousness is increased by the conclusion of the Central Intelligence Agency that the Bulgarians knew ahead of time of the plot and did nothing to stop it, but that it was instigated neither by the Bulgarians nor by their masters, the Russians.

The attack on Pope John Paul in St. Peter's Square in Rome by Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Asca occurred 20 months ago. Yuri N. Andropov then was head of the KGB secret police in the Soviet Union. He now is leader of the USSR.

Experts agree it's inconceivable that Bulgaria could have been a party to the plot against the pope without the approval (if not the active complicity) of the KGB.

The experts also agree if Yuri Andropov had a hand in the plot, and that hand was, unmistakable to Americans and other people of the Free World, neither President Reagan nor any other western leader could sit down with Mr. Andropov to negotiate arms control agreements or anything else. An outraged public would forbid it.

This would be a dangerous state of affairs, but probably could not be avoided if the facts of the matter were proved to be quite the opposite of what the CIA has said they are.

Skeptics suggest the CIA deliberately smudged the question so that there could be a summit meeting on arms control between the President and Mr. Andropov. The suggestion is both inappropriate and cynical, based, as it can only be at this time, on speculation.

Italian authorities are continuing what has been described as "the most careful and comprehensive investigation" of the plot against the pope, and of the so-called Bulgarian connection. What they will find remains to be seen. But the chances seem poor they can come up with irrefutable evidence of Soviet complicity.

If such evidence existed, you can bet the KGB has been working furiously to destroy it.